Annual Review of Sociology

The Comparative Politics of Collective Memory

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Annu. Rev. Sociol. 2020. 46:175–94

The *Annual Review of Sociology* is online at soc.annualreviews.org

https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054808

Keywords

politics of memory, collective memory, commemorations, difficult pasts, nationalism, transnational memory

Abstract

This article examines the theoretical and empirical contributions of the interdisciplinary field of memory studies for a comparative sociology of collective memory and politics. We identify three major empirical foci that have structured the scholarship: the role of collective memory in the creation, legitimation, and maintenance of national identities and nation-states; political reckoning with the memory of difficult and violent pasts; and the ongoing transnationalization of collective memory. We conclude with suggestions for future research on the politics of memory given the rise of populism and so-called fake news.

INTRODUCTION

George Orwell notoriously noted, in his dystopian novel *1984*, that "who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." This holds not only in Orwellian totalitarian regimes, of course, and politicians of all stripes have long known that. The politics of collective memory is therefore an important social, political, and cultural issue that sociologists must pay close attention to. Thankfully, research on collective memory in the last decades has moved to the center of the humanities and social sciences. Memory studies is now a robust, multidisciplinary enterprise, bridging areas from the social sciences to disciplines as diverse as philosophy, neuroscience, and media and communication studies. The field now has a dedicated journal (*Memory Studies*, established in 2008) and a formal association (established in 2016), and it has produced important handbooks defining its canon (e.g., Erll & Nünning 2008, Olick et al. 2011).

In this review, we discuss the theoretical and empirical contributions of the interdisciplinary field of memory studies for a comparative sociology of collective memory and politics. Our goal is not only to provide a discussion of the wide-ranging literature on the politics of memory but also to trace the evolution of the field on that topic. We identify three major empirical foci and corresponding moments in the scholarship, which structure the review. The first empirical focus concerns the role of collective memory in the creation, legitimation, institutionalization, and maintenance of national identities and nation-states. Scholars of nationalism took the lead in that discussion and shone a bright light on collective memory, which had been sitting in relative shade until then. The second set of empirical issues concerns difficult and violent pasts, collective traumas, and political contests over the definition of the past and its memory. As we show, it is the study of these specific issues that coalesced memory studies as a field and that yielded the greatest output. We provide in that part of the review a discussion of five cases that highlight different processes for reckoning with difficult pasts and violence: Germany, Japan, Poland, the United States, and Turkey. Finally, we turn to the most recent trend in the scholarship on the politics of memory, which attempts to transcend the national framework and focuses on collective memory's transnational and global aspects.

Definitions

What is politics of memory? At the most general level, it designates the shaping of collective memory by political actors and institutions. Most of collective memory (see Halbwachs 1992) could then be considered political to some extent. The expression is a popular variation on the politics of history, and it entered the literature through the German *Geschichtspolitik*, which combines politics and history within a single term. While *Geschichtspolitik* specifically describes Germans' reckoning with their Nazi past, which included formal apologies, reparations, and memorialization, the politics of memory concerns debates about the past and how the past should be recorded, remembered, and disseminated, more broadly, or else silenced and forgotten. The politics of memory can involve historical policies, policies that distinguish between true and correct histories and false/falsified ones; specify how history should be narrated; or even legally regulate specific interpretations of the past via memory laws (Noiriel 2012, Belavusau & Gliszczyńska-Grabias 2017, Gensburger & Lefranc 2017). Revisionist historical policies are especially salient following regime change and range from place-name changes and the removal of monuments to the literal rewriting of history. Given how important collective memory is for national identity, it is often enshrined in constitutional texts, disseminated in educational institutions, and promoted in the media and popular culture.

A Caveat

The literature on the politics of memory is marked by an impressive degree of interdisciplinarity and by a wide range of international empirical objects. Moreover, it is a literature to which international scholars have made important contributions. We are committed to make that apparent in this review, although in order to be most helpful to readers of the *Annual Review of Sociology*, we focus primarily—although not exclusively—on publications available in English.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND NATIONALISM

The study of collective memory occupies a central position in the scholarship on nationalism. In a first phase, the literature was primarily focused on demystifying nationalist claims of ancient national histories to establish the modernity of the nation. It documented the various strategies states and nation-builders utilized to create a collective national memory and the role of memory in generating a more or less unified national identity where it previously did not exist. A second phase in the field focused on commemorative practices as a means through which to solidify national identity and reaffirm national solidarity. Most recent literature has moved to the study of the different processes through which collective memory and nationalism become imbricated in daily life.

Invented Traditions, *Lieux de Mémoire*, and Commemorations

Because the nation was instituted as a new form of political organization in the nineteenth century, much work had to be done to legitimize and naturalize it. Historians were recruited to articulate new narratives and modes of story-telling. From then on, the story of the past was no longer that of dynasties and intrigues within royal houses but narrated instead with the nation cast as a protagonist moving steadily through time (Anderson 1983). Historians in that period therefore regarded themselves "not merely as transmitter of the national heritage, but as 'molders of opinion'" (Duara 1995, p. 21). Their task, as famed French Romantic historian Jules Michelet conceived it, was "to speak for past generations, to bestow on them a national history" (quoted in Gillis 1994, p. 8). It is for that reason that historians are often considered nation builders, sometimes even being elevated to the status of fathers of the nation (Duara 1995, Berger & Lorenz 2010).

These new national narratives were shaped by the specific political imperatives of respective nations, but everywhere a new national collective memory needed to be molded for the people to care for the nation. Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983), in their canonical volume *The Invention of Tradition*, convincingly showed that the state and government agencies invented new traditions with fictitious links to the past to create this new collective memory to the extent that most of what people remember as part of their national past was invented between 1870 and 1914 by self-interested actors. A key objective then was to foster allegiance to the newly created nation-states and their elites at a moment of social and political unrest, hence the widespread establishment of commemorative holidays and the construction of national monuments at the turn of the century.

Pierre Nora (1984) and his collaborators investigated that commemorative frenzy in the French context but from a Durkheimian rather than a Marxist perspective. They carefully documented what they called *lieux de mémoire*—symbolic sites of memory—through which the French state and the nation were being sacralized. Nora argued that there was an increase of commemorative practices in the twentieth century as a result of a decline of lived, authentic memory (what he and others refer to as *milieux de mémoire*). As such, his concern went beyond that of the initial moment of creation of national identities and included a (nostalgic) reflection on the condition of collective memory and identity in modernity.

Both paradigms had a lasting impact on the respective fields of nationalism and memory studies. The invention of tradition created a fruitful framework for the study of individual cases, such as Quebec (Handler 1988), Israel (Zerubavel 1995), and Japan (Vlastos 1998), and Nora's *lieux de mémoire* programmatic approach was replicated by social scientists in many other national and transnational contexts (e.g., Den Boer 1993, Isnenghi 2008, Sengupta 2009, Saryusz-Wolska & Traba 2014, Górny & Kończal 2016). Commemoration more specifically became and remains an important topic of investigation for scholars interested in collective memory and politics (Bodnar 1991, Gillis 1994, Spillman 1997, Dabrowski 2004), and it is an especially salient point of entry for the study of contested memories and difficult or violent pasts, as we discuss in greater detail in the section titled Reckonings with Difficult Pasts (Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz 1991, Vinitzky-Seroussi 2009, Conway 2010, Hite 2012).

History, Memory, and Forgetting

If a shared memory is essential to national identity, so is collective amnesia. Already in the late nineteenth century, French historian Ernest Renan [1996 (1882), p. 45] stated in his famed "What Is a Nation?" that "forgetting [and] historical error [are] . . . crucial . . . in the creation of a nation." Anderson [1991 (1983)] argued that this is so because misremembering past conflicts between antagonistic groups as *fratricides* and then forgetting them makes possible the discursive transformation of the modern nation into an antique family, a brotherhood that managed to overcome past divisions. This is key because it is ultimately a feeling of filial love "that makes possible . . . for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly die for [the nation]" [Anderson 1991 (1983), p. 7].

The creation of national identity through the articulation of a master narrative of the nation came at a price, however, as it implied the forgetting of alternative memories, identities, and loyalties (local or religious, for example) (Gillis 1994, Duara 1995). Weber (1976) documented how local and ethnic identities were suppressed between 1870 and 1914, the period of France's cultural homogenization. As a result of that oft-violent process, local dialects (*patois*) were mostly forgotten after two or three generations. Likewise, scholars have shown that museums collect certain objects deemed valuable or representative of the national heritage while neglecting artifacts of local, indigenous, or peasant collective memory (Kaplan 1994, Sherman 2008, Levitt 2015).

With the rising political salience of multiculturalism and identity politics in Western societies, and the attending ascent of postmodernism and postcolonial studies in academia, the field shifted gears toward the study of those forgotten histories—of women, ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, and other marginalized groups. The investigation of oral histories, folk traditions, and material culture as carriers of silenced collective memory produced an important strand of scholarship in both nationalism and memory studies that was less state centered but no less attentive to politics and power dynamics (Ballinger 2003, Edwards 2016, Yoneyama 2016).

National Sensorium, Material Culture, and Heritage

A recent wave of scholarship has turned its attention to everyday nationalism, vernacular culture, and the myriad ways in which collective memory and national identity were created and sustained alongside, outside, or even against the state (Billig 1995; Brubaker et al. 2006; Zubrzycki 2011, 2016). Zubrzycki (2011, 2016), for example, has shown that collective memory is created through the visual depictions of national narratives in art, commodities, and family heirlooms, and it is embodied in mourning rites, commemorative practices, religious processions, parades, and protests. She has shown that it is through this national sensorium that social actors viscerally experience national narratives and that those are remembered by individuals as their own. This in turn

generates sentiments of belonging to what is otherwise merely a distant imagined community. Thanks to the national sensorium, personal, familial, and collective memories are confounded. As such, the national sensorium plays an especially salient role in stateless or colonized nations, which do not have at their disposal the resources afforded by a national state and are often articulating their own collective memory and national identity against that state (Jewsiewicki 1995, Jarman 1997, Zubrzycki 2016).

While some components of the national sensorium are part of high culture, others are mundane objects. Their everydayness does not render them less potent, however, as individual and collective memories are often embodied in them in deeply meaningful ways. In a recent study, Bach (2017) showed how East Germans' relationship to their past has been expressed in their treatment of East German stuff. If they initially dumped all things East German, some were soon compelled to hoard anything from East Germany, while others more discerningly collected, cataloged, and displayed innocuous objects of the former German Democratic Republic as precious carriers of personal, familial, and collective memories. Bach showed how everyday East German objects presented semiotic links between the past and the present, as either fetishized nostalgic artifacts or ironic commodities. By doing so, he got to the heart of what has been called ostalgia, or nostalgia for the East (on ostalgia, see Berdhal 2010, Boym 2001; on nostalgia in postcommunist Europe more generally, see Todorova & Gille 2010, Nadkarni & Shevchenko 2014).

If the East German case captures how national subjects react in unsettled times, attachment to mundane objects can also be fostered by their configuration as prized vessels of collective memory and precious carriers of national heritage in settled times. Kowalski (2017) explored that process in France. She showed that the notion of heritage disseminated through popular magazines and television shows in the 1960s and 1970s altered the perceptions of ordinary peoples' quotidian habits and household objects, transforming them into hallmarks of Frenchness worth conserving and transmitting as *patrimoine*. In a similar line of inquiry, Greenland (2017) showed that even useless and valueless ceramic fragments can be become cornerstones of the nation-state once they are discursively converted into national treasures that link modern Italians to the ancient Etruscans and as such are protected by state organs. By turning the dirt that cradled those pottery fragments into Italian soil, she showed, they become endowed with a sacred quality that shapes Italians' collective memory and further legitimizes the state's cultural policies. While the monumental Berlin Wall symbolized the separation between Soviet-occupied Europe and the free world, its few material traces are now consecrated German memory: They serve as a reminder that the separation of the two Germanies needed to be enforced and policed and also act as an index of social and cultural differences between the two Germanies that remain (Bach 2017).

The above-mentioned literature shows that the mundane, profane, and banal can shape collective memory and be politically potent. Molnár (2017) analyzed the manufacturing, sale, and consumption of radical nationalist commodities that present revisionist versions of history in Hungary. The selling and buying of tourist guides, posters, or T-shirts depicting pre-1920 maps of the Hungarian Kingdom reignites the painful collective memory of losing large chunks of territory after the Treaty of Trianon. This is not harmless nostalgia, as it creates a deep sense of injustice and resentment toward Europe that can translate into anti–European Union sentiment and fuel irredentist politics. And because these nationalist claims enter the mainstream through innocuous consumer goods, they are difficult to counter.

RECKONINGS WITH DIFFICULT PASTS

Given the importance of historical narratives and collective memory in the creation and maintenance of political regimes, political ruptures often involve revisiting and sometimes revising those

narratives. The end of wars and violent conflicts or the fall of political regimes therefore places memory at the center of public and political debates, as has been the case following the dismantlement of colonial empires, the end of dictatorships, and the fall of communism.

In Eastern Europe, the postcommunist transition implied the end of censorship and the abandonment of official ideological lines. Many archives were suddenly opened, granting scholars access to sources previously unavailable to them. This made possible the emergence of a clearer picture of World War II in the region as well as greater transparency on the inner workings of socialist states. Historical curricula had to be redesigned and textbooks rewritten. Some countries engaged in lustration, a process that ranged from purging government officials and removing compromised personnel from positions of authority to publicly revealing the identity of those who collaborated with the regimes and prosecuting former leaders for decisions they made under the previous system (Nalepa 2010, David 2011). In some places, ordinary citizens were able to access the files the state kept on them, revealing how pervasive surveillance was, sometimes breaking up families and long-standing friendships (Glaeser 2011, Verdery 2018). Lustration can therefore have a profound social impact, and not all societies in transition choose that path. The Spanish Pact of Forgetting (*Pacto del olvido*), following Franco's death in 1975, and Poland's post-1989 thick line policy (*gruba kreska*) were meant to break with the past without engaging with it, focusing on the future instead. That tactic has had mixed results, however, as the past in both these cases has been the object of important unresolved mnemonic battles (Resina 2000).

The late twentieth century and beginning of the 2000s also witnessed a growing number of nation-states and smaller communities demanding, offering, or denying apologies and expressions of remorse for historical wrongs committed in recent or more distant pasts. This historically unprecedented rise of what Olick (2007) has called the politics of regret included official state apologies (Gibney et al. 2008, Nobles 2008, Celermajer 2009), reparations and negotiations (Torpey 2006, Walker 2013), truth commissions (Ferrara 2015, Bakiner 2016), international tribunals (e.g., Totani 2008), and other types of reparative remembering (Dawson 2007; see also De Brito et al. 2001, Rigney 2012). Those coexist in stark contrast with the continuing phenomena of silence and denial (Vinitzky-Seroussi & Teeger 2010, Wang 2012, Zubrzycki 2013).

In what follows, we discuss five societies' different paths to acknowledging difficult pasts.

Germany: Collective Guilt of the Perpetrator

Postwar Germany has become an exemplary model for accepting historical responsibility, negotiating spoiled national identity, and working through the past, a process Germans refer to as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. That complex process was all the more important because of Germany's role in both world wars and because of having perpetrated what is considered one of history's worst crimes against humanity (Olick 2007, 2016). Although Germany's responsibility was unequivocal, its reckoning with the past and embrace of collective guilt was not a straightforward process.

Facing the Nazi legacy came to the center of public life shortly after Germany's unconditional surrender to the Western Allies, as denazification was required for reconciliation in Europe. Denazification and trials of war criminals were but two aspects of the process. The very essence of the German national character had to be scrutinized, and ordinary Germans, many of whom had suffered under and after the Nazi regime, also had to internalize responsibility for the war. Allies displayed photographic evidence of war atrocities and made German citizens visit concentration camps in their effort to produce feelings of remorse and generate collective guilt (Brink 2000, Niven 2003). Collective guilt was eventually woven into the national narrative—to some extent thanks to *Geschichtspolitik*—but it was also repeatedly contested and became an object of debate between progressive and conservative German intellectuals (Evans 1987). Nevertheless, remorse

became so central to the national ethos that the inability of some state officials to engage with the Nazi past within that paradigm ended their careers. This was notoriously the case with the President of the Bundestag, Philip Jenninger, who delivered a widely condemned commemorative speech in 1988 that led to his resignation.

Although many scholars applaud Germany's public acknowledgment of its responsibility for the war, Olick (2016) suggested that state-sponsored reckoning with the past has actually been "organized to *deny* collective guilt" (p. 29; emphasis added). In his analysis of leading politicians' commemorative speeches until reunification, he showed that they tended to commemorate the war more generally rather than specifically focus on the state-sponsored genocide. He also identified ways in which the protracted process of accepting war responsibility was compromised: The first two decades after the war, for example, were characterized by a defensive and exculpatory rhetorical style and an emphasis on German victimhood. It was followed by a period during which the Nazi past became an inherent part of national identity—including for new generations of Germans—but eventually, discussions of the Holocaust became abstract and philosophical, ultimately leading to its presentation as a universal experience.

While the extent to which Germans dealt with their historical responsibility is debatable, on the comparative spectrum of redress politics, Germany stands out as a successful case. For some scholars, Germany is a shining example of how such a process can strengthen rather than undermine democracy as well as transform political culture (Meyer 2008, p. 174). With the iconic image of Willy Brandt kneeling at the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising memorial in 1970, or with its formal apology to Poland in 1994, Germany has emerged as the paragon of the politics of regret (Olick 2007). As such, Germany's reckoning with its violent past is often positively contrasted with Japan, whose apologies are often deemed insincere by its East Asian neighbors (Conrad 2003).

Japan: Perpetrator and Victim

Japan has not been as successful as Germany in dealing with its role in the Asia–Pacific War. One factor significantly impeding its reckoning with the complex legacy of the past is Japan's dual status as perpetrator and victim.

Shortly after the war, Japan reimagined itself as a peace-loving nation, a notion enshrined in the 1947 constitution, which is referred to as the peace constitution. The acknowledgment of its role in the war, however, was complicated by the victimization of ordinary Japanese with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, followed by the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945–1952). The American-led demilitarization and democratization of Japan hindered the discussion of American responsibility for the bombings (Dower 1999), which sharpened victim consciousness (*higaisha ishiki*). Since responsibility could not be openly attributed to the Americans, the atomic bomb became an abstract perpetrator and the nuclear trauma became part of a national narrative of Japanese exceptionalism (Orr 2001; see also Yoneyama 1999). The United States' decision to exempt emperor Hirohito from the Tokyo War Crimes Trials and preserve him as the symbolic head of the state also added a layer of complexity: If the Americans allowed the emperor to remain on the throne, could Japan's guilt be so great?

Japanese interpretations of the war are therefore split between collective guilt and victimhood, making a unified expression of historical responsibility difficult. Moreover, the international pressure to acknowledge crimes committed against neighbors was minimal until Japan normalized its diplomatic relations with Korea (in 1965) and the People's Republic of China (in 1972). The acceptance of guilt has been a dynamic and protracted process over half a century. Following a trajectory similar to, yet different from, that of Germany, Tsutsui (2009) showed that the responses evolved from denial, justification, and evasion to projection and displacement and then to remorse

and a universalizing frame. Tsutsui linked this evolution to changing international relations and the rise of global human rights on the one hand and changing domestic developments on the other. The rise of nationalism and national hubris following the economic miracle of the 1980s (Gluck 1993) as well as the mnemonic battles between conservative and progressive politicians, intellectuals, and grassroot activists have further complicated the polyvocal collective memory of the war (Saaler 2005, Hashimoto 2015, Takenaka 2015).

The 1990s in Japan also brought about sweeping societal and political changes, and the 1989 death of wartime emperor Hirohito paved the way to the new discourse of responsibility (Gluck 2009). Generational change has certainly led to a greater acceptance of historical responsibility among the young (Schwartz et al. 2005). Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of historical responsibility is far from universal (Fukuoka 2013). The periodic resurfacing of various history problems (Kim & Schwartz 2010, Kim 2016, Saito 2016a), such as the repeated visits of Japanese state officials to the infamous Yasukuni Shrine where the souls of war criminals are enshrined, their disputing of particular atrocities such as the existence of comfort women, and the very rhetorical properties of apologies offered only work to add fuel to the fires of contests over the past (Shibuichi 2005, Seraphim 2006, Yamazaki 2006, Hasegawa & Tōgō 2008, Soh 2008). The official apologies offered in the 1990s are also being compromised by the conservative Liberal Democratic Party's leaders. All this contributes to Japan's continued image as a nonapologist nation-state (Schneider 2008).

Poland's Narrative Shock: Victim and Perpetrator?

As in other Eastern Bloc countries, history in socialist Poland was subject to close scrutiny. The way World War II was officially presented followed a socialist narrative in which capitalist fascists murdered, terrorized, and exploited nations of the region that were thankfully liberated by the victorious Red Army (see Wawrzyniak 2015). In that narrative, Jews and the Holocaust took a backseat as they were folded into a longstanding Polish narrative of martyrdom (Zubrzycki 2006). Moreover, with very few Jews left in postwar Poland, the remembering was left to ethnic Poles, who focused on their own suffering and traumas (Irwin-Zarecka 1989, Steinlauf 1997).

The collapse of communism in 1989 and the opening of Soviet archives in the early 1990s revised old narratives. Memorial plaques were erased and reinscribed (Young 1993). The opening of the Eastern Bloc also brought Poles into contact with a narrative of the war in which the Holocaust occupied a central place, significantly destabilizing Polish collective memory (Zubrzycki 2006). The Polish-language publication, in 2000, of *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Gross 2001) had an even greater impact on collective memory. *Neighbors* described, in painful details, the torture and murder of Jews by their ethnically Polish neighbors. It created a watershed public debate about Polish-Jewish relations and generated public soul-searching about the role of Poles in the Holocaust and thereafter, creating such a potent mnemonic rupture that one could speak of Poland before and after the publication of the book. The Institute of National Remembrance launched an inquiry, and on the sixtieth anniversary of the pogrom, the (leftist) government erected a monument and the President of the Republic offered apologies.

These historical and narrative revisions led to a narrative shock—a questioning of Polish collective memory that shook national identity to its core (Zubrzycki 2006, 2011, 2013). The shock was so great that many have turned to denial, while some work diligently at uncovering and documenting Polish crimes against Jews (e.g., Gross 2006, Grabowski 2013). Yet others are engaged in a multifaceted project aimed at remembering, commemorating, and even resurrecting Jewish culture in Poland. Zubrzycki (2016, 2017) has argued that the many museological projects,

cultural festivals, and acts of salvage remembrance are part of a political project aimed at expanding the symbolic boundaries of the nation beyond the narrow confines of Polishness and Catholicism.

It was in reaction to this multifaceted mnemonic awakening that in 2018 the right-wing Law and Justice–led parliament voted amendments to the Institute of National Memory Law threatening to prosecute anyone claiming that the Polish Nation was responsible for Nazi crimes. The law is deployed to stall what the populist Right calls the politics of shame. In the battle over Polish collective memory, historical policies are meant to remythologize collective memories. Poles who rescued Jews—and who are honored by Israel as the Righteous Among Nations—are now celebrated in books and museums; have streets, schools, and parks renamed in their honor; and have new monuments dedicated to their memory (Hackmann 2018; on the global memory of the righteous, see Gensburger 2016).

Polish society therefore went through a significant process of reckoning with its past; that reckoning, however, has led to greater division instead of consensus. Polish society is now perhaps more polarized than it ever was, and the politics of memory plays a key role in making it so.

United States: Refusing Collective Responsibility, Emphasizing Personal Agency

While the cases discussed so far underline the significance of political upheaval to jumpstart reckonings with difficult and violent pasts, it goes without saying that less radical transformations can also generate debates about history and memory. The United States is a case in point: It has not undergone regime change, yet the politics of memory in the United States is certainly a salient aspect of public debates.

The Red Power movement in the 1960s was important for bringing to the fore in national conversations the violent colonization of the territory and the enduring discrimination against Native Americans (Cornell 1988, Wunder & Hu-DeHart 1992). Ensuing political debates and legal fights about land claims and the treatment of indigenous peoples struck a powerful blow against the hegemonic myth of American nationhood. In the symbolic sphere of national holidays, nearly a dozen states have stopped commemorating October 12 as Christopher Columbus' discovery of the Americas and are now celebrating the date as Indigenous Peoples' Day instead.

Discussions about slavery, the Civil War, and Jim Crow were also significant during the 1960s' Civil Rights movements and regained salience in the 2010s with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. The commemoration of confederate generals and war heroes as well as the presence of the confederate flag in the public sphere have been at the center of intense debates. As a result of vocal opposition to these symbols, South Carolina retired the flag in 2015, and the Washington National Cathedral's stained glass window honoring Confederate generals was removed in 2017. Confederate monuments continue to serve as catalysts for clashes between opposing camps in the memory war over the meaning of the Civil War, slavery, and racism (see also Blight 2001, Brundage 2005). Plans to remove an equestrian statue of General Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia, provoked a deadly clash between white supremacists and their opponents in August 2017.

Contests over memory are not restricted to the southern states, however. Recent research has brought to light conveniently forgotten evidence of slavery in the North (Miles 2017, Ross 2018), chipping away at the myth of an enlightened North and providing impetus for a nationwide discussion about historical responsibility and the need for official redress. The issue of reparations has been raised several times during the 2019–2020 Democratic race, coinciding with the 400th anniversary of the first slave ship to arrive in Virginia in 1619, bringing wide attention to the fact that the United States has yet to fully address its own difficult past.

The myths of Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth century and of the American Dream in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—the latter with its emphasis on individual agency—make

difficult the acknowledgment of inequality resulting from the legacies of slavery and settler colonialism. Nieman (2019) also argued that the American reflection on racism and violence is conducted through discussions on Nazism and the Holocaust instead of through a critical self-reflection. Moreover, due to the protracted nature of violence against African Americans and Native Americans, both the memory of and the reckoning with that past are an intergenerational matter. This tends to diffuse the reparations claims made by mnemonic agents and social activists. Howard-Hassmann (2004) compared African Americans' reparations claims with those made by Japanese Americans for their internment during World War II. She showed that the success of Japanese Americans depended on the fact that the perpetrator (the US government) and individual victims were clearly identifiable, and that many of them were still alive. The case for slavery reparations is more difficult to make, she argued, because of the absence of a clear collective perpetrator and because there are few survivors of slavery alive today. The "causal chain of harm" (Howard-Hassmann 2004, p. 823) is therefore long and complex and makes reparations more difficult to promote in the public sphere.

Turkey: Generations of Denial

At the other end of the apology–denial spectrum is Turkey. Unlike Japan, where the friction between international and domestic pressures has reversed some official narratives of denial and pushed toward official apologies, in Turkey, such reversal does not seem likely (Dixon 2018). In spite of compelling evidence, significant international pressure, and rising domestic debates, the Turkish state still denies that the deaths of approximately 1.5 million Ottoman Armenians via direct murder, torture, starvation, and forced deportations constituted a genocide (Göçek et al. 2011, Akçam 2012, Suny 2015). Turkey's denial hinges upon the 1948 definition of genocide by the United Nations (2020) and its refusal to concede that the "Events of 1915" were committed with the state's intent "to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."

The assassination of Turkish-Armenian newspaper editor Hrant Dink in 2007 was a turning point in the debate over the Armenian question in Turkey. Dink had been an outspoken advocate for minority rights, Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, and the recognition of the genocide by the Turkish state. He was murdered on the street by a Turkish ultranationalist while on trial for violating an article of the Turkish Penal Code that makes illegal "the public denigration of the Turkish Nation, the State of the Turkish Republic or the Grand National Assembly of Turkey" (Amnesty Int. 2006). Similarly to the initial Polish Holocaust Speech Law, its violation is punishable with imprisonment. A year after Dink's murder, journalists, politicians, and professors launched an online campaign to recognize, and collectively apologize for, the Armenian Genocide (which signatories could not refer to as such and tellingly used instead "the Great Catastrophe that Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915") (Euractiv 2008). Within a few months, the letter had garnered over 30,000 signatures; however, the initiative was met with much indignation. Prime Minister Erdoğan insisted that Turkey had not committed any crime and therefore did not need to apologize; other politicians, former diplomats, and some historians also condemned the apology. Signatories were often harassed, receiving hate mail and even death threats.

Over a decade has passed since Dink's assassination and the mobilization it generated, and the censorship and repression of those discussing the genocide is as great as ever. In spite of continued international pressure on Turkey to acknowledge its commission of the genocide, the state (along with large segments of Turkish society and the Turkish diaspora) wraps itself tightly into denial. Why? Göçek (2014) has argued that the genocide acted as foundational violence that made possible continued patterns of violence and authoritarianism, and that denial became a cornerstone of Turkish statehood, as different layers of lies and omissions were built onto it: the Young Turks'

denial of the acts of violence (1908–1918), the early Republican denial of the actors involved in the violence (1919–1973), and the late Republican denial of the responsibility for violence (1974–2009). Recognizing the Armenian Genocide, for example, would incriminate the Young Turks—the fathers of the nation—and therefore threatens the present Turkish state's very *raison d'être*. The genocide and its denial, then, are ultimately shaping the political modernity of Turkey. That provocative argument helps us understand cultural, political, and institutional roadblocks to recognizing (and apologizing for) the Armenian Genocide and provides the tools to understand the ongoing crisis in Turkey. Perhaps most importantly, it helps us see denial not as a political stance about a specific historical event, or as a coping mechanism after a collective trauma, but as a process related to state formation and national affirmation.

Between Acceptance and Denial: A Sociological Framework

As the discussion so far makes clear, the politics of memory is shaping societies on every continent on the globe, providing rich materials for scholarly inquiry. Academic attention has turned to how collectivities come to terms with their difficult pasts and collective traumas (on cultural trauma more broadly, see Alexander et al. 2004; on trauma and politics, see Edkins 2003), whether and how states acknowledge responsibility and apologize for wrongs committed against their own citizens and/or others, and how societies redefine their collective memory in the process. The study of those processes has led to significant scholarly advances and provided important analytic leads for sociologists. We conclude this section with important takeaway points.

First, national reckoning with the past ranges from acceptance to denial, and a given nation-state's place on the spectrum tends to be contingent on that society's role in the difficult past. The literature on the German, Japanese, Polish, United States, and Turkish cases suggests, however, that coming to terms with the past is a complex process whose outcome is not predetermined. Places with mixed historical experiences (like Japan or Poland), for example, have greater difficulty acknowledging crimes they committed against others. Lim (2010) argued that this is the case because, in such places, responsibility is attributed to individuals and then subsumed within the broader collective experience of victimization. The summary provided in **Table 1**, therefore, points to the problematic victim/perpetrator binary that has informed much writing about historical responsibility and redress. The category of the more or less passive bystander was introduced to break that binary (e.g., Staub 1989). Yet, the perpetrator-bystander-victim triad still fails to capture the complexity of difficult pasts. Rothberg (2019, p. 1), therefore, has proposed the category of the implicated subject: "a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator." We find this reframing promising in capturing the complexity of personal and collective historical responsibility, especially in cases where a clear-cut identification of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders is difficult.

Table 1 Reckonings with difficult pasts

Country	Historical experience	Official memory	Unofficial memory
Germany	Perpetrator	Acceptance	From victimhood to responsibility
Japan	Perpetrator-victim	Compromised acknowledgment	From victimhood to remorse and polarization
Poland	Victim-perpetrator	Between acceptance and denial	Narrative shock and mnemonic warfare
United States	Perpetrator	Partial acknowledgment	Division and mnemonic warfare
Turkey	Perpetrator	Denial and silencing	Some countermemorial efforts

Second, when it comes to redress movements, scholarship in political science, and in political philosophy especially (Lind 2010, Hinton 2011, Cunningham 2014), has spilled much ink discerning between good and bad apologies. As significant as these normative assessments are, what matters from a sociological perspective is to identify the different paths to, and conditions for, the recognition of collective guilt (Trouillot 2000, Olick 2016). Apologies rarely provide definitive closure—especially when addressed to groups whose suffering has long been denied or forgotten—and whether they are accepted by governments and internalized by the broader population depends on a variety of contingent factors (Tavuchis 1991, Fine 2013, James & Stanger-Ross 2018). Saito (2016b), therefore, argued that instead of working toward prescriptive models of apologies, social scientists should pay attention to their performative aspects, including the audience and the actors involved, or the means of their symbolic production and power inequalities. Bernhard & Kubik (2014) argued that memory regimes—which they defined as dominant ways of remembering specific issues, events, or processes—emerge as the outcome of battles between different mnemonic actors. This brings the politics of memory down to the ground, with close attention to political, economic, social, and symbolic interests and resources of mnemonic actors and groups. Both these approaches are useful, as they configure the politics of memory as a dynamic field and collective memory as the legitimating symbol actors fight over.

GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONAL MEMORY

The accelerated pace of globalization in the twenty-first century has had a deep impact on mnemonic processes the world over. The emergence of a global popular culture and the fast and extensive spread of media representations (on prosthetic memory, see also Landsberg 2004), with the advent of the internet and the rise of online communication, have paved new routes for the creation and diffusion of collective memories that transcend both national borders and national cultures' idioms. The growth and strengthening of international organizations and institutional networks such as the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization have had an undeniable effect on shaping memory. Global migration flows have also facilitated an unprecedented movement of collective memories. With these economic, political, and cultural developments, scholars of memory have embraced the transnational turn by emphasizing memories on the move (Erll 2011). A wide-ranging vocabulary to capture the dynamic movements of memory across time and space has therefore been developed, including traveling (Erll 2011), entangled (Feindt et al. 2014), and multidirectional (Rothberg 2009) memory (see also De Cesari & Rigney 2014).

Holocaust Remembrance and Transnational Memory

The remembrance of the Holocaust proved crucial in this move toward transnational memory (and its study). With increased spatiotemporal distance, newer generations formed memories of the genocide through familial narratives and historical accounts, constituting what Hirsch (2012) has termed postmemory (on generational change and transmission of memory more broadly, see also Corning & Schuman 2015). The Holocaust has also been mediated and globalized through cultural representations such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, as well as through iconic memorials such as those in Berlin, Washington, and Jerusalem (Young 1993, Cole 2000, Doss 2010). Such transnational remembrance of the Holocaust led to the formation of what Levy & Sznaider (2006) called cosmopolitan memory, which coexists with but also transcends national collective memories. Levy & Sznaider point out, however, that the refracturing of

the Holocaust through popular culture has moved Jewish victimhood to the background, as the genocide of European Jewry is reconfigured as a crime against humanity and a universal symbol of evil.

Although the expansion of the Holocaust's meaning is seen as problematic by some scholars, others see it as an opportunity. Aleida Assmann (2010), for example, argued that while the experiences of World War II varied greatly across European countries, the Holocaust is the common thread with which a transnational European memory could be woven. Creating a properly European identity, rooted in its specific history and culture, has gained in political salience as the unity of the European Union was shaken by its expansion eastward; by increased migration to the European continent from Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia; and, most recently, by the rise of populism, Euroscepticism, and Brexit. As a transnational European identity is believed to be necessary for the success of the political union, the articulation of a European memory has been a key concern (Assman 2007, Bottici & Challand 2013). Since Europe sees itself as defined by the values of the Enlightenment, key to its memory project is what has threatened those values: genocidal violence and totalitarianism. Hence the European Parliament's declaration, on the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz on January 27, 2005, that the day would from then on be a European day of commemoration; the establishment of August 23 as the European Day of Remembrance of Victims of Nazism and Stalinism in 2008; and an official Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism, adopted on April 2, 2009.

Memory on the World Stage

The seeming dominance of the Holocaust as a reference point for other cases of crimes against humanity, such as slavery in the United States or colonial violence in various corners of the world (Moses 2008), has led to the perception that collective memory is a field with limited real estate for which different actors must fight for the recognition of their own traumas. In *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Rothberg (2009) argued instead that collective memories do not compete with each other in a zero-sum game; they actually emerge through mutual engagements and negotiations and reinforce each other through borrowings and cross-referencing. This is why we observe a proliferation rather than a decrease of collective memories on the world stage. It is precisely memory's multidirectionality that makes collective memory such a powerful aspect of modernity.

Some events by their very nature also transcend local and national boundaries to become hallmarks of transnational memory. The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, became the iconic event marking the fall of communism in Eastern Europe (Sonnevend 2016), even though other processes were more decisive in the collapse of the system. This suggests the power of symbols and iconic images in shaping our understanding of events as they happen and how we end up remembering complex events and processes. Likewise, the global diffusion of images of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks has made possible the creation of a transnational memory of the events, which in turn might have made possible global forms of solidarity and military alliances (Simko 2015, Truc 2017).

The global diffusion of images and their rapid narration and inscription onto transnational collective memories within international scripts of genocides and human rights also pose some challenges to societies wishing to overcome the memories of those pasts. Once a country is labeled and remembered by the world as a violent place, it takes hard work to change the narrative. Germany has managed that shift by embracing responsibility. Others attempt to elide difficult pasts to increase their attractiveness on the international level and boost tourism revenues through omission and the reframing of violent narratives. Rivera (2008), for example, showed that

the Croatian state omitted any reference to the Yugoslav wars in its promotional materials as a (successful) marketing strategy to rebrand the country as an attractive tourist destination. To what extent do these policies and tourists' willful forgetting of a troubling past impact the collective memories of local populations? Or create divergent memories between national populations and others who visit them? These are important questions for researchers to turn to. In spite of concerted efforts such as those analyzed by Rivera, societies that are the site of past violence often become the object of dark tourism, increasingly popular throughout the world (Lennon & Foley 2000, Miles 2015, Stone et al. 2018).

CONCLUSION

Collective memory was used as a tool for nation-building in the nineteenth century, became a burden in the aftermath of nationalist and other totalitarian excesses in the twentieth, and has moved beyond the national framework in the twenty-first. The focus of social scientific research has naturally evolved to follow its shifting empirical object. What direction might future research take?

On the one hand, sociology has yet to fully embrace the potential of multidirectional and transnational approaches to memory to the extent other disciplines have. While we have outlined some important debates already occurring in the field, such an approach requires further theoretical and methodological innovations that transcend methodological nationalism. The emergence of new technologies of memory—most notably various types of social media—should also come under greater sociological scrutiny, especially as it impacts national and transnational sensoria.

On the other hand, while some mnemonic boundaries are seemingly transcending the nation, others are paradoxically reinforced or built anew by mnemonic communities and political actors seeking to recenter identity, memory, and political power around the nation. Right-wing populist and neofascist movements, on the rise everywhere on the globe in recent years, are working diligently at repatriating collective memory and policing its borders. While definitions of populism vary (see Jansen 2011, Müller 2016), the rhetoric used in populist discourse typically presents the nation as divided between the good people and corrupt elites. That discursive framework allows for the borrowing of the victim-perpetrator binary as a mobilizing strategy (Wodak 2015). White males, then, become victims of the Black Lives Matter or the Me Too movements, or Poles fall victim to a Jewish conspiracy to blame the Holocaust on them. While populism and nationalism are distinct analytic categories, they are nevertheless closely related and often overlapping empirical phenomena, as they both rely on the dichotomy of insiders and outsiders. Bonikowski et al. (2019) add that "nationalism infused with populism *enables a politics of resentment and nostalgia*, which is as much a battle against elites as it is a reassertion of dominance over ethnic, racial and cultural minorities" (p. 74; emphasis added). Collective memory, especially as it pertains to unresolved difficult pasts and sentiments of collective trauma and guilt, can help frame elected elites, immigrants, and various others as morally corrupt enemies of the nation and justify breaching democratic rules in response to them (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018).

Moreover, in the era of fake news, the present is easily manipulatable and the past perhaps even more so. Future research should pay attention to the ways in which collective memory is used in politics in a post-truth world and the impact this new type of memory warfare has on political outcomes.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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Annual Review
of Sociology

Volume 46, 2020

Contents

Prefatory Article

My Life in Words and Numbers
Samuel H. Preston 1

Of Modernity and Public Sociology: Reflections on a Career So Far
Claude S. Fischer 19

Theory and Methods

Advances in the Science of Asking Questions
Nora Cate Schaeffer and Jennifer Dykema 37

Computational Social Science and Sociology
Achim Edelmann, Tom Wolff, Danielle Montagne, and Christopher A. Bail 61

The Longitudinal Revolution: Sociological Research at the 50-Year Milestone of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics
Fabian T. Pfeffer, Paula Fomby, and Noura Insolera 83

Tracking US Social Change Over a Half-Century: The General Social Survey at Fifty
Peter V. Marsden, Tom W. Smith, and Michael Hout 109

Social Processes

Climate Change and Society
Thomas Dietz, Rachael L. Shwom, and Cameron T. Whitley 135

Social Networks and Cognition
Edward Bishop Smith, Raina A. Brands, Matthew E. Brashears, and Adam M. Kleinbaum 159

Institutions and Culture

The Comparative Politics of Collective Memory
Geneviève Zubrzycki and Anna Woźny 175

Why Sociology Matters to Race and Biosocial Science
Dorothy E. Roberts and Oliver Rollins 195

Formal Organizations

Employer Decision Making
Lauren A. Rivera 215

Political and Economic Sociology

Organizations and the Governance of Urban Poverty
Nicole P. Marwell and Shannon L. Morrissey 233

Relational Work in the Economy
Nina Bandelj 251

What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig Economy
Steven Vallas and Juliet B. Schor 273

Differentiation and Stratification

Black Immigrants and the Changing Portrait of Black America
Tod G. Hamilton 295

Immigrant Selectivity Effects on Health, Labor Market, and Educational Outcomes
Cynthia Feliciano 315

Multiracial Categorization, Identity, and Policy in (Mixed) Racial Formations
Kimberly A. DaCosta 335

Race/Ethnicity over Fifty Years of Structural Differentiation in K–12 Schooling: Period-Specific and Life-Course Perspectives
Samuel R. Lucas, Santiago J. Molina, and John M. Towey 355

The Impact of Inequality on Intergenerational Mobility
Thomas A. DiPrete 379

Transnational Professionals
Brooke Harrington and Leonard Seabrooke 399

Individual and Society

Class Position and Political Opinion in Rich Democracies
Arvid Lindh and Leslie McCall 419

Contemporary Social Movements in a Hybrid Media Environment
Neal Caren, Kenneth T. Andrews, and Todd Lu 443

Norms: An Integrated Framework
Christine Horne and Stefanie Mollborn 467

The Sociology of Creativity: Elements, Structures, and Audiences
Frédéric Godart, Sorah Seong, and Damon J. Phillips 489

Demography

Migration Patterns in East and Southeast Asia: Causes and Consequences
Eric Fong and Kumiko Shibuya 511

Return Migration Around the World: An Integrated Agenda for Future Research
Jacqueline Maria Hagan and Joshua Thomas Wassink 533

Sociology, Genetics, and the Coming of Age of Sociogenomics
Melinda C. Mills and Felix C. Tropf 553

Technologies and Health Inequities
Stefan Timmermans and Rebecca Kaufman 583

Urban and Rural Community Sociology

Cities of the Global South
AbdouMaliq Simone 603

Urban Mobility and Activity Space
Kathleen A. Cagney, Erin York Cornwell, Alyssa W. Goldman, and Liang Cai 623

Policy

Sociology and the Climate Crisis
Eric Klinenberg, Malcolm Araos, and Liz Koslov 649

The Social Consequences of Disasters: Individual and Community Change
Mariana Arcaya, Ethan J. Raker, and Mary C. Waters 671

Sociology and World Regions

Violence in Latin America: An Overview of Research and Issues
Carlos Vilalta 693